

Written

Senator Musto, Representative Jutila, members of the Government Administration and Elections Committee, my name is Andrea Barton Reeves, and I am Vice President of Administration at HARC. For the past 61 years, we have supported people with intellectual and related disabilities and their families live with dignity and inclusion. Thank you for the opportunity to testify in favor of Senate Bill 761, AN ACT MAKING THE JANITORIAL WORK PILOT PROGRAM FOR PERSONS WITH A DISABILITY OR A DISADVANTAGE PERMANENT, proposing to expand the Preferred Purchasing Program for persons with disabilities.

As you may know, for people with intellectual and other disabilities, finding opportunities for competitive or supported employment is a challenging task. It is so difficult for people with disabilities to overcome misperceptions and stereotypes about their capabilities and their ability to contribute productively to a work environment. This is especially true in a recovering economy, where competition for any open job is fierce and employers are reticent to take a chance on anyone they may have uncertainty about. I am here today to ask you to be courageous enough to pass SB 761, which proposes to expand an already successful pilot program to as the bill reads "create and expand janitorial work opportunities for persons with a disability and persons with a disadvantage." Your courage in passing this bill will say to every employer that the State of Connecticut is committed to employment opportunities for every citizen, and that it believes that the benefits of providing work opportunities for people with disabilities.

Governor Malloy has spoken time and again about preserving the Safety Net of services that supports Connecticut's most vulnerable citizens. Often, preserving the Safety Net is perceived as the State spending more money to support people who cannot support themselves. By passing SB 761, the State has the chance to weave the Safety Net in a different way - a way that creates jobs that enhance independence and develop tax-paying citizens where they might not otherwise exist.

HARC has believed in and committed extensive resources to employment for individuals with disabilities in the community for over twenty years. We have proudly participated in the Preferred Purchasing Program for over ten years. Our participation in the program, coupled with our own collaborations with over 30 businesses throughout greater Hartford, has

allowed us to see firsthand the mutual benefit that comes from creating and providing meaningful work opportunities for people with disabilities. We have over 75 participants working in insurance companies, hospitals, retail facilities and even here, in the Legislative Office Building.

SB 761, which proposes to expand the Preferred Purchasing Program to the Judicial Branch, would offer even more people with disabilities the opportunity to work. Work means more independence, greater contribution to society, enhanced self-esteem and meaning and purpose to one's life.

Every single person in Connecticut who is capable of working should have that chance. We are a state and a nation of equality and opportunity. We believe in the dignity of every citizen and nothing brings one more dignity than earning their own paycheck and contributing to their own financial self-sufficiency. Supporting SB 761, expanding an already successful program, does more than provide opportunities for work for people with disabilities; it demonstrates that this State is committed to job creation and to providing opportunities for meaningful, dignified work for every citizen in the state, without regard to disability. I urge you to pass SB 761, demonstrating the State's commitment to employment for persons with disabilities.

Thank you for your consideration

Respectfully Submitted,

Andrea Barton Reeves